

II. AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1 - 7. (Canceled)

8. – 18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently amended) A pharmaceutical composition for stimulating nitric oxide production in mammalian cells, said pharmaceutical composition comprising an effective amount of extract of *Salix alba*, wherein the *Salix alba* extract is prepared by a process comprising:

- (a) homogenizing dried *Salix alba* in an acidic solution;
- (b) preparing a supernatant by separating solid material from the homogenized acidic solution using alcohol extraction and centrifugal filtration;
- (c) drying the supernatant;
- (d) preparing an elute by dissolving the supernatant in an aqueous solution containing trifluoroacetic acid and extracting a solid phase; and
- (e) ~~extracting the effective amount of extract by~~ purifying the elute using high performance liquid chromatography to obtain said extract.

20. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, the process further comprising:

identifying and characterizing the ~~effective amount~~ of extract using mass spectrometric analysis.

21. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, wherein the ~~effective amount~~ of extract stimulates nitric oxide production in mammalian cells.

22. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, wherein the ~~effective amount~~ of extract contains a first compound with a molecular weight of 263.3 Daltons and a second compound with a molecular weight of 356.5 Daltons and a third compound with a molecular weight of 337.5 Daltons and a fourth compound with a molecular weight of 354.4 Daltons.

23. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, ~~further comprising~~ wherein the composition has at least one component selected from a group consisting of: a component have a molecular weight of 353.28 Daltons, a component have a molecular weight of 109.09 Daltons, and a component have a molecular weight of 97.1 Daltons.

24. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, ~~further comprising~~ wherein the composition has the ability to stimulate nitric oxide release in the range of 15 nM to 100 nM in pedal ganglia cells.

25. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, ~~further comprising~~ wherein the composition has the ability to stimulate nitric oxide release in the range of 50 nM to 100 nM in endothelial cells.

26. (Currently Amended) The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 19, ~~further comprising~~ wherein said extract displays a single major peak on high performance liquid chromatographic analysis in 10 mM sodium chloride, 0.5 mM EDTA, 100 mM sodium acetate and 50% acetonitrile, pH 5.0.

27. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing a *Salix alba* extract, comprising:

- homogenizing dried *Salix alba* in an acidic solution;
- preparing a supernatant by separating solid material from the homogenized acidic solution using alcohol extraction and centrifugal filtration;
- drying the supernatant;
- preparing an elute by dissolving the supernatant in an aqueous solution containing trifluoroacetic acid and extracting a solid phase; and
- ~~extracting the effective amount of extract by~~ purifying the elute using high performance liquid chromatography to obtain said extract.

28. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 27, further comprising:

- identifying and characterizing the ~~effective amount of~~ extract using mass spectrometric analysis.

29. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 27, wherein the ~~effective amount of~~ extract stimulates nitric oxide production in mammalian cells.

30. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 27, wherein the ~~effective amount of~~ extract contains a first compound with a molecular weight of 263.3 Daltons and a second compound with a molecular weight of 356.5 Daltons and a third compound with a molecular weight of 337.5 Daltons and a fourth compound with a molecular weight of 354.4 Daltons.

31. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 27, wherein the ~~effective-amount of~~ extract includes at least one component selected from a group consisting of: a component have a molecular weight of 353.28 Daltons, a component have a molecular weight of 109.09 Daltons, and a component have a molecular weight of 97.1 Daltons.